

Exhibit H

NEWS

In her own words: Woman describes Cuomo's alleged groping at mansion

Woman says governor's 'sexually aggressive' behavior increased over time



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Will Waldron/Times Union

ALBANY — The call came on a weekday in late November. The [governor](#) inexplicably had a technical issue with his [mobile phone](#) and needed assistance at the Executive Mansion.

He contacted one of his top executive assistants at the Capitol, Stephanie Benton, and made a blunt request: The governor wanted a specific female staff member to handle the minor assignment — a woman roughly half his age. That woman had joined the administration a few years earlier, eager to pursue a career in government and to put her bachelor's degree in political science to good use.

She walked to her car parked at the Capitol and drove a short distance to the governor's mansion. In a recent interview with the Times Union — her first public statements on the matter — she described what happened when she reached the office on the second floor: The governor came out from behind his desk, and began groping her in a sexually aggressive manner.

"And that wasn't just a hug," she said. "He went for it and I kind of like was, 'Oh, the door is right there.' ... I was mortified that a woman who works here is going to come in and see. ... I was terrified of that happening, because that's not who I am and that's not what I'm here for."

BREAKING NEWS

Cuomo resigns after report said he's a serial sexual harasser

In this still image from video, Gov. Andrew Cuomo speaks during a news conference in Albany, N.Y. on Tuesday, Aug. 10, 2021. Cuomo has resigned over a barrage of sexual harassment allegations in a fall from grace a year after he was widely hailed nationally for his detailed daily briefings and leadership during the darkest days of COVID-19.

Office of the Governor of New York via AP

Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo on Tuesday said he will resign as governor, effective in 14 days, in the wake of an attorney general's report that concluded he was a serial sexual harasser.

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As panic set in, it flashed in her mind that insulting the governor could cost her the career she had been working so hard to build.

"I said to him, I said, 'You're going to get us in trouble,'" she recalled. "I didn't know what else to say. ... It was pretty much like 'What are you doing?' That's when he slammed the door (shut). He said, 'I don't care.'"

He walked toward her a second time.

"I remember exactly what I was wearing," she said. "I remember him slamming (the door) so hard that I remember thinking to myself that I'm sure the staff is, like, 'Is everything OK up there?' He came right back and he pulled me close and all I remember is seeing his hand, his big hand. I remember looking down like, 'Holy sh_.'"

The governor, she said, had reached under her blouse and his hand was grasping one of her breasts over her bra.

"I was just so confused and so taken aback by it. ... He never said anything, which was odd," she said. "At this moment, I don't know what to say — I don't know what to do. Now my hives are coming out. I'm, like, swearing in my mind. I remember I walked out and he walked back into his office. ... I remember going downstairs and escorting myself out and going to my car and sitting there for a second and going, 'OK, I have to now go back into the Capitol, go back to my desk and do my job and pretend that, like, that didn't just happen.'"

"I didn't have another choice. I remember (thinking), 'You have to pull yourself together ... even if you have to sit here for a couple minutes to do that,'" she continued. "If I told someone, I'm done. And who do you tell?"

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The New York State Executive Mansion is viewed through a fence on Tuesday, March 9, 2021, on Eagle Street in Albany, N.Y. (Will Waldron/Times Union)
Will Waldron/Times Union

'The things that I would do to you'

The allegations are the most serious that have been leveled against Cuomo over the past four months by multiple women who have come forward and accused him of sexual harassment and other inappropriate conduct, triggering an investigation by the state attorney general's office and [an impeachment inquiry](#) initiated by the state Assembly.

Yet the groping allegations at the mansion have drawn the most attention, including garnering interest from law enforcement officials and demands from top New York Democrats for the governor to resign immediately — a request he has rebuffed.

In the backdrop of the dual investigations and the political theater, the young woman at the center of the most serious allegations has soldiered on, reporting to her job at the Capitol where she has endured an occasional "dirty look" and fewer work assignments.

She was already thin, but has lost significant weight, is emotionally fragile, and — as the mother of a young child — remains concerned about job security.

In a lengthy interview with the Times Union last week, she detailed how it got to this point. She spoke on the condition of anonymity to protect her privacy, although it is widely known in the governor's inner circle who she is and what she has alleged.

For roughly two years, she said, she believes Cuomo had been grooming her in a pattern of inappropriate behavior that began with tight hugs and kisses on the cheek.

"It was never in front of anybody. He made sure that it was either at the mansion or, if it was at the Capitol, that no one was around," she said. "I remember thinking one time Stephanie was around, or (Secretary to the Governor) Melissa (DeRosa) was around, and I had been so used to him getting up and hugging me that when he didn't I said 'Hmm.' It felt calculated — he would totally act different."

By early last year, the governor's hugs had grown tighter — he would try to pull her close to feel her breasts against his chest, she said: "Sometimes he would pull my whole body close to him. I remember purposely, like, taking my pelvis and pulling away. ... I knew what he was doing."

The conversations had also evolved into Cuomo asking probing and inappropriate questions.

She recounted one of those conversations that took place about a year ago: "He looked at me one time and said, 'Oh, if you were single, the things that I would do to you.'"

'The governor will be stealing you'

On her first day as an executive assistant in late 2017, when she was being introduced to members of the governor's staff on the "secure" side of the Capitol's Executive Chamber, she was unsettled by a comment another woman had made to her.

"She said, 'Oh, you're going to get stolen.' I just smiled. She said, 'You just wait and see, and the governor will be stealing you,'" the woman said. "That was my first day, and that was my first time that I said to myself, 'I know that wasn't normal.' You hear stories about what happens at the Capitol. ... I know what she meant by that."

For several months, her career path took her away from the governor's office, and she went to work for a top official at a state agency. But she missed the bustle and energy of the Capitol, and took an opportunity in June 2019 to return to the governor's staff

as an executive assistant to one of Cuomo's top advisors.

By that November, she had been called on more frequently to help the governor, occasionally at the mansion on weekends, but almost always with someone around. Still, the governor, she said, had "noticed her."

"Does he trust you? He's big on trust. He lets you know that," she said. "If you're able to have so much face time with the governor, he must trust you. It's a badge of honor."

But that face time came with fallout. Sometimes, she said, after taking dictation for the governor, he would come out from around his desk and hug her. Over time, the hugs grew tighter and lasted longer. He would occasionally blame his Italian roots for his propensity to finish the hug by kissing her on the cheek. It's an excuse he has invoked often in response to the recent allegations.

"I'm still thinking that interaction was weird, but who are you going to tell?," the woman said. "My supervisor is his closest confidante. You're going to be out."

'Let's take a selfie'

The woman said that in late 2019, the governor's conduct around her became more aggressive and the flirtatious conversations more inappropriate.

On New Year's Eve that year — a Tuesday — she was dispatched to the mansion to assist the governor as he was working on his State of the State address.

They were alone in Cuomo's office and he said, "Let's take a selfie," she recalled. "I said OK. I remember standing up in his upstairs office. I was holding up the phone. I was nervous. As the phone is up I feel him, like, not just sliding his hands, he's like rubbing my butt cheek, but not saying anything. That was the first blatant move."

She recalled that her hand started to tremble as she held the phone.

"I couldn't get a clear picture. He didn't say anything and I didn't say anything because now ... it's very easy to say, 'Well, why didn't you slap him?,'" she said. "You're like, 'Is this really going on, is this happening?' I remember him doing it for more than a second. I said, 'I can't take a good picture, governor.' He said, 'Why don't we just sit down on the couch and try to take a better one?'"

"So we sit down, we take a photo and he said, 'Oh, I like that photo,'" the woman said.

He asked her to send it to another female colleague — but cautioned her to never show it to anyone else.

"I said, 'Yes sir, I understand, and I won't.' I never did," she said. "If he looks you in the eye and says, 'You don't tell a soul or tell anyone,' then you won't. He's kind of letting you know it would be in your best interest not to, if you know what's good for you. ... I didn't tell a soul. I didn't say anything about what he did. He never mentioned anything about that incident."

But early last year, before the coronavirus pandemic, she said his conversations with her — especially at the mansion — grew increasingly inappropriate.

"He's like, 'Would you ever do anything with anyone else?' I said 'No,'" she said. "He said, 'I'm single and ready to mingle.'"

In the ensuing weeks and months as COVID-19 engulfed New York, she rarely saw the governor. Many staff members worked from home and some had to quarantine. The governor's office took steps to minimize the number of employees reporting to the Capitol.

"If it wasn't for this pandemic and me being quarantined and being home, I'm sure that the groping probably would have happened sooner," she said. "I didn't see him for a long time."

Eventually, she said, her contact with the governor began picking up again late last year. "The governor would hug me, but nothing like from pre-pandemic because I hadn't seen him. I hadn't talked to him."

There was a pool party last year hosted by the governor for hand-picked staffers — a reward for their hard work during the pandemic. "I wasn't invited," she said.

But in November, she said, after being summoned to the mansion to help Cuomo with his iPhone, everything changed.

"I don't remember actually saying the word 'Stop.' I think I said, 'You're crazy,'" she said. "I do remember saying that, and that's when he ultimately stopped. ... Me saying 'You're crazy' — that was definitely not something that he wants to hear. It definitely was a hit to his ego. ... And then it was almost like instantly he was done. ... He turned around and walked back to his desk. He didn't say anything. I walked myself out to the front door and nothing was said. ... It was almost like I felt like a piece of garbage to him. I felt degraded."

On Feb. 27, the New York Times [published an interview](#) with Charlotte Bennett, another former female aide who accused Cuomo of inappropriate conduct. In a news conference four days later, the governor brushed aside what he had said was advice from his legal counsel to remain silent during the attorney general's [newly launched investigation](#).

"I now understand that I acted in a way that made people feel uncomfortable," he said. "It was unintentional and I truly and deeply apologize for it. I feel awful about it and, frankly, I'm embarrassed by it — and that's not easy to say, but that's the truth."

"But this is what I want you to know, and I want you to know this from me directly: I never touched anyone inappropriately," he said. "I never touched anyone inappropriately. I never knew at the time that I was making anyone feel uncomfortable. I never knew at the time that I was making anyone feel uncomfortable. I certainly never, ever meant to offend anyone or hurt anyone or cause anyone any pain. That is the last thing I would ever want to do."

In the Executive Chamber, staff members were monitoring the news conference. Hearing Cuomo's denial, the woman who has accused Cuomo of groping her was overcome with emotion.

An executive assistant noticed her colleague had started tearing up, and went to her aid. The woman had never told anyone what had happened, but she began telling the executive assistant about the incident at the mansion.

Five days later, on March 8, that executive assistant reported the woman's allegations to a supervisor in the governor's office. The following day, [the Times Union reported](#) the woman's allegations and the governor's office confirmed they had reported the matter to the attorney general's office.

In response to [questions from the Times Union](#) that week about the new allegations, Cuomo issued a statement saying, "I have never done anything like this. The details of this report are gut-wrenching."

On March 12, the woman was accompanied by her attorney, Brian D. Premo of Albany, when she was interviewed in New York City by investigators with the state attorney general's office, according to a person briefed on that matter.

Rita Glavin, Cuomo's attorney, issued a statement Wednesday saying the governor maintains that he did not touch anyone "inappropriately."

"The people of New York know the governor — he has spent 40 years in public service and in the public eye. He has repeatedly made clear that he never made inappropriate advances or inappropriately touched anyone," Glavin said. "The attorney general's review of this claim and others, including evolving details and new public statements by complainants or their surrogates, must be thorough, fair and provide the truth."

'You can never tell anyone'

Bennett's account was not the first allegation of sexual harassment to be leveled against the governor. Lindsey Boylan, another former aide, had tweeted in mid-December that the governor had "sexually harassed me for years."

"Many saw it, and watched," Boylan wrote. "I could never anticipate what to expect: would I be grilled on my work (which was very good) or harassed about my looks. Or would it be both in the same conversation? This was the way for years." (Boylan would offer [more details](#) in an essay she published on Medium in February, just days before Bennett's allegations came to light.)

The governor's press secretary, Caitlin Girouard, issued a statement in response to Boylan's initial allegations, saying there is "simply no truth to these claims."

But inside the administration, Boylan's accusations in December triggered concern.

Later that month, the woman who has accused him of groping her said she was taking dictation for the governor at his Capitol office when he brought up what had happened a month earlier.

"Near the end of it, he looked up at me and he said, 'You know, by the way, you know people talk in the office and you can never tell anyone about anything we talk about or, you know, anything, right?'" she recalled of the conversation. "I said, 'I understand.' He said, 'Well, you know, I could get in big trouble, you know that.' I said, 'I understand, governor.' And he said, 'OK.'"

The woman said she interpreted the governor's words that day as a threat.

"I was a liability, and he knew that," she said. "He was definitely trying to let me know, 'It would be in your best interest (to keep quiet).' ... I know his look and I know how intimidating he can be. He wanted to get a message across to me."

Timeline of allegations made against Gov. Andrew Cuomo

- March 19:** [Current aide accuses Cuomo of sexual harassment](#)
- March 9:** [Female aide claims governor touched her inappropriately; complaint reported to AG](#)
- March 7:** [Cuomo defies calls to step down after former press aide Karen Hinton accuses him of misconduct](#)
- March 6:** [Another ex-aide, Ana Liss, calls Cuomo's office conduct inappropriate](#)
- March 1:** [Anna Ruch accuses Cuomo of unwanted advance at wedding: 'Can I kiss you?'](#)
- Feb. 27:** [Cuomo accused of sexual harassment by second former aide, Charlotte Bennett](#)
- Feb. 24:** [Ex-Cuomo staffer Lindsay Boylan says governor asked her to play strip poker, harassed her](#)



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